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ABSTRACT

A review of external studies in Western Australia was undertaken, with attention directed to the future pattern of development, including the institutions to be involved and the nature of their involvement. A continued demand has been exhibited for external studies opportunities, and there is a trend to expand and refine existing offerings rather than introduce new fields or major new approaches. In addition, business studies and teacher education are areas that need monitoring. Other need areas include: better articulation within the postsecondary education system--between courses and institutions; more flexible study packages providing for on-campus and off-campus study during the academic year and in vacation periods; improved academic support for students, including counseling, tutoring, and library and study facilities; and more flexible course structures. The specific external studies programs of the following institutions are also examined: Murdoch University, Western Australian College, Western Australian Institute of Technology, Pilbara Colleges, and the University of Western Australia. Possible approaches for increased coordination are noted. (SW)

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REVIEW OF EXTERNAL STUDIES

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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN POST SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

1982

REVIEW OF EXTERNAL STUDIES:

POST SECONDARY EDUCATION EXTERNAL STUDIES OPPORTUNITIES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN POST SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

DECEMBER 1982

REVIEW OF EXTERNAL STUDIES

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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN POST SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

REVIEW OF EXTERNAL STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

1. Following its consideration of the External Studies Working Party Report the Commission resolved (R 61/750) to establish a committee to examine the major issues contained in the report. The issues include -

   i) the future pattern of development of external studies in Western Australia, including the institutions to be involved and the nature of their involvement;

   ii) the access of metropolitan and non-metropolitan students to external studies opportunities; and

   iii) the appropriate co-ordinating mechanism for external studies.

2. Since the Working Party Report was completed the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) has expressed concern about the trend towards proliferation and duplication of external studies opportunities. In its report for the 1982-84 triennium the CTEC supports greater concentration of external studies offerings and identifies those institutions which are equipped to have a major role in providing external studies in a range of fields at various levels. Two such institutions are identified in WA - Murdoch University and the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT). The CTEC report notes that a number of other institutions have an involvement in external studies and that some of them have substantial external enrolments. However, it contends that most of the external offerings by these institutions are concentrated in a limited number of fields, and often only in teacher education.

3. Measures undertaken by State co-ordinating authorities aimed at more effective co-ordination of external studies have also been noted by the CTEC. Nevertheless it has put the view that the potential for unnecessary duplication remains and measures to provide for the concentration of external studies and collaboration between the institutions should be further encouraged. The CTEC has also referred to the need for effective accreditation procedures for advanced education courses offered on an external basis.

4. With the formation of the Western Australian College of Advanced Education (WACAE), based on the amalgamation of Churchlands, Claremont, Mt Lawley and Nedlands colleges of advanced education, the pattern of external studies providers in WA has changed from that reflected in the Working Party Report. The external studies opportunities provided at Mt Lawley and on a more modest scale, at Claremont and Nedlands are now concentrated in the WACAE. The new College is currently reviewing its academic program and measures are likely to emerge which are aimed at rationalising the study opportunities provided, including those offered on an external basis. As a result of the amalgamation, the basis for the future development of external studies has clearly changed and this in turn has implications for the appropriate form of co-ordination of external studies.

5. The Commission's External Studies Committee has the following membership -

Dr W A Pullman, Chairman
Mr B R Scott
Miss M G Vernon
Mr R Standish) Commission secretariat
Mrs J Harris)

Dr D A Purcell, a past member of the Commission, was also a member but as the work of the Committee was well advanced at the time his term on the Commission ended, he was not replaced.

6. In carrying out its brief the Committee spent some time generally reviewing the Working Party Report and considering the external studies profiles of institutions involved in external studies. The Committee agreed that the major issues it needed to address were those identified by the Commission (see paragraph 1), although some matters related to these issues were considered during its deliberations. Other recommendations and issues raised in the Working Party Report in the Committee's view may more appropriately be taken up by the institutions, and as necessary with the Commission, where matters of co-ordination and development of the post secondary education system are concerned. The Committee also had detailed discussions with representatives from each of the institutions involved in external studies, including the Pilbara Colleges, focusing on the major issues identified by the Commission. Details of those participating in the discussions are set out in Attachment 1.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF EXTERNAL STUDIES

7. As a result of its deliberations the Committee is able to make a number of general observations with regard to the future development of external studies and to comment in more specific terms with respect to the external studies role of individual institutions.

8. With the present pattern of institutional involvement, namely Murdoch University, WACAE, WAIT and the Technical Extension Service (TES), supported by country based institutions such as those in the Pilbara, and the restricted funding climate for education, a period of steady development in external studies seems likely, at least for the next 3-5 years. The general features noted by the Committee include -

   i) there is a buoyant and sustained demand and need for external studies opportunities which has particular importance given the geographic circumstances of Western Australia;

ii) provision which in the main reflects complementary offerings with no significant overlap between opportunities provided by the institutions - nevertheless specific areas which need to be monitored include -

- Business Studies - the role to be played by the WACAE, bearing in mind the existing commitment of WAIT;

- Teacher Education - the need to ensure that the involvement of Murdoch University, WACAE and WAIT continues to be complementary;

iii) recent developments in external studies have focussed on modest expansion and refinement of existing offerings rather than the introduction of new fields or major new approaches to external studies - this pattern seems likely to continue in the foreseeable future, although some significant initiatives could emerge, for example, through joint institution arrangements aimed at improving and extending opportunities for country and remote students;

iv) there is widespread support for improved articulation or "loosening-up" within the post-secondary education system - particular examples include -

- provision for easier movement of students between courses and institutions - credit transfer, advanced standing arrangements concurrent enrolment involving studies at more than one institution;

- provision for more flexible study packages providing for on-campus and off-campus study during the academic year and in vacation periods;

- provision for improved study support for students, including metropolitan, country and remote students, with respect to joint institution arrangements, counselling services, tutor support, library and study facilities;

- introduction of more flexible course structures - foundation years providing a broad education for non-metropolitan students who may then complete a particular qualification through a metropolitan-based institution;

- rationalisation of subjects to avoid proliferation within particular discipline areas;

- improved flexibility in responding effectively to the needs of students having regard for their particular situation, be it in the metropolitan area, country or remote areas, rather than system-based solutions such as a network of study centres throughout the State, which are not supported;

v) some gaps are evident in the present provisions, including external studies opportunities for courses offered by the University of WA, and in fields which are more difficult to offer externally, for example, the physical sciences and engineering, and in other areas where demand and need is not so well established, for example, communication sciences;

vi) mixed views were expressed with regard to both the more immediate and longer term impact of new technology, and in particular satellite communication, on external studies -

- the need for those involved in education to maintain an ongoing involvement in the planning and development of new technology was recognised; and

- with the above point in mind, the more immediate priority was seen to relate to improvement in existing external studies opportunities.

vii) although some data is available on external studies and statistical information was included in the Working Party report, there is a need for improved information on various aspects of external studies, for example costs, retention and student background - the Commission, in conjunction with the institutions, should take up this matter.

9. The points which follow emerged from the Committee's consideration of the specific external studies offerings provided by the institutions.

Murdoch University

i) the University's external studies program has expanded quite rapidly and provides opportunities at undergraduate level and in a more limited way at post-graduate level in a number of fields of study - external studies are a significant aspect of the University's total academic program;

ii) efforts in the foreseeable future will concentrate on maintaining, and where possible further improving the quality of existing external studies opportunities; and

iii) any additional resources that might be made available are likely to be committed to improvements in the teaching process rather than to developing new study areas or broadening the provisions made for external studies.

WA College

i) the College's major external studies commitment to this time continues to be in post-experience teacher education courses, with some developments in related fields, for example, health education and intercultural studies;

ii) despite the downturn in the employment opportunities for teachers over recent years the College may be expected to have a significant continuing role in providing teacher education programs, including external studies opportunities in post-experience courses;

iii) as the Academy of Performing Arts becomes fully established some external studies proposals may be expected to emerge, consistent with the Academy's role;

iv) the College's program review committee has addressed the question of the College's future role in external studies, including possibilities for diversification, for example, teacher education (post-experience), and general studies; and

v) the Committee believes that as a matter of principle the College has a significant role to play in providing external studies opportunities in the State - the profile of involvement may be developed by the College in conjunction with the Commission but would include teacher education, performing arts and some other areas.

WAIT

i) WAIT offers a wide range of external studies opportunities in most of the fields of study covered by its academic programs; and

ii) future developments will be focused on further qualitative improvements and rounding out of opportunities in fields of study offered by WAIT which do not at present include external studies.

Technical Extension Service

i) the TES provides an extensive range of award and non-award (adult education) opportunities;

ii) future developments are likely to be concerned with qualitative improvements in the opportunities provided within an enrolment limit of 20 000 students (slightly higher than the present level) and commensurate resources - consideration is being given to developing flexible study packages which would be offered through the TES and other institutions run by the Department in metropolitan and country locations; and

iii) no significant overlap is seen between TES programs and external studies opportunities provided at other institutions.

In-service Teacher Education (Education Department)

i) the Department has a major responsibility for providing non-award courses while the institutions provide for award course requirements;

ii) there appears to be some scope for improved collaboration between the Department and relevant institutions in the provision of non-award course study opportunities, for example -

- staff within the institutions developing study packages for the Department on a contract basis;

- institutions assisting the Department in offering programs on a collaborative basis; and

iii) the Department will continue to be solely responsible for a significant proportion of non-award in-service teacher education programs.

Pilbara Colleges

i) the Colleges are concerned to respond to the considerable scope that they have for meeting regional needs both in their own right and in conjunction with metropolitan-based institutions, for example -

- offering counselling, tutorial and other support services to students in the region, including those enrolled through metropolitan-based institutions

- offering under contract programs or parts of programs run by these institutions

- developing in conjunction with these institutions general programs, for example a foundation first year in science engineering or business, which will allow students to study locally at first and then undertake the later years of more specific programs offered by the metropolitan-based institutions.

The University of Western Australia

i) no change is envisaged in the arrangements made following the establishment of Murdoch University to transfer responsibility for external studies opportunities for university award programs to Murdoch from the University of WA.

ii) the University of WA is keen to see the further development of collaborative arrangements with Murdoch University and would favour this approach to address specific unmet needs for external studies opportunities to which it can make a contribution; and

iii) the University of WA's Extension Service has the primary responsibility for meeting non-award program requirements serviced by the two universities. The future development of the Extension Service is currently being considered by the University in the context of a general review of its operation and future priorites.

ACCESS

10. The Committee has noted that of the total number of external students in the State a high proportion is resident in the metropolitan area and that the institutions' admissions policies have contributed to this development. Admission policies for external study vary between institutions and reflect the general policies of the institutions concerned and the needs met by their external studies offerings. For example, the WACAE, having regard for the needs of country-based teachers, restricts external studies opportunities for metropolitan students to those who are unable to attend on-campus classes. Other institutions, notably Murdoch University and the Technical Extension Service, have a more open admissions policy aimed at providing a range of study opportunities to meet individual needs, whether students are located in metropolitan, country or remote regions.

11. General support was expressed to the Committee for improving access to study opportunities by the introduction of measures aimed at increasing flexibility in study arrangements, transfer of credit etc. It was also acknowledged that progress with some of these measures would require additional resources, for example the provision of improved counselling services to assist students in selecting study packages to meet their particular requirements.

CO-ORDINATION

12. The Working Party agreed that there is a need for the co-ordination and development of external studies and its proposals focus on the establishment of a standing advisory committee to the Commission chaired by the Chairman of the Commission and including representatives from the

post secondary education institutions. Functions envisaged for the committee include assessment of the demand and need for external studies, development of proposals for improving external studies opportunities and for fostering greater use of co-operative arrangements between institutions, and consideration of ways in which identified needs might be met. The committee would establish working parties as necessary to assist with specific projects associated with these tasks.

13. The provisions to be made for the co-ordination and development of external studies must now be considered in a different context from that which prevailed during the Working Party's deliberations. Significant changes include the establishment of the WACAE and the general move towards consolidation of external studies provisions which is likely to continue as a significant feature of the institutions' commitment to external studies in the foreseeable future. The Committee has noted the following points arising from these changes -

i) there is now a clearer indication of institutional roles in providing external studies opportunities, although some specific issues remain -

- clarification of the WACAE's role

- monitoring of particular fields of study such as Business Studies and Teacher Education;

ii) widespread support for the view that a significant feature of future external studies developments should be measures aimed at "loosening-up" the system - many of the measures considered by the Committee relate to broad policy matters which go beyond the more immediate concerns of external studies; and

iii) the general conditions affecting the future development of external studies, including institutions' priorities in a context of restricted funding, indicate that the pattern of development will be evolutionary rather than one of major developments.

14. The Committee's discussions with institution representatives also raised a number of points on the question of co-ordination of external studies and these are set out below -

i) strong support for arrangements less formal (than those included in the Working Party Report);

ii) the development of external studies should proceed on the basis of broad guidelines (established by WAPSEC), with the institutions being responsible for the more specific aspects of developments - the concept of institutions being self-regulatory was commended;

iii) support was expressed for representation of non-metropolitan institutions on any co-ordinating group that is established;

iv) mixed views were expressed with regard to the size and nature of the membership of the co-ordinating group; and

v) the Committee supported greater attention being given to external studies provisions as part of the accreditation process and noted that this matter was being taken up in the Commission's review of accreditation policies and procedures for advanced education courses.

The Future Pattern of Development of External Studies

15. The Committee noted that -

i) in general the present pattern seems appropriate

- no significant overlap or duplication;
- there is a basis for developing and extending provisions to meet the needs of country and remote students - for example the Pilbara Colleges' developments;
- each of the major external studies providers, Murdoch University, WAIT and TES have defined and distinctive roles;

ii) there is a substantive case for a significant role to be played by the WACAE in external studies -

- based on teacher education;
- some further diversification into fields such as performing arts and areas related to teacher education; and

iii) institutions are aware of the CTEC's views on the development of external studies (see paragraphs 2 and 3) - in this context there is a need for the Commission and the institutions to provide for the continued effective development of external studies in the State.

Access

16. The Committee noted that -

i) considerable encouragement should be given for the implementation of "loosening-up" measures, such as those referred to in paragraph 8(iv), as these measures offer considerable scope for improving access for metropolitan and non-metropolitan students; and

ii) the effects of the varied admission policies of the institutions with respect to the access of metropolitan and non-metropolitan students to external studies opportunities should be monitored so as to avoid disadvantaging any particular group of students.

Co-ordination

17. The Committee while recognising that the establishment of the WACAE has reduced the number of institutions involved in external studies provision in WA, believes that there is a need and enhanced opportunity for co-ordination of these activities. Particular aspects relate to planning for the effective development of external studies in the State and the distinctive roles to be played by participating institutions. In the Committee's opinion the Commission, in conjunction with the institutions, has a function to perform in relation to these broader issues, while the institutions are best able to address more specific aspects of the development of their own external studies activities.

18. Against this background and the need to indicate to the CTEC that the State has appropriate policies and procedures for the effective development of external studies, the Committee considered a number of possible approaches to co-ordination including -

i) establish a formal standing commitee - along the lines proposed in the Working Party Report;

ii) make no specific arrangements, but ensure that the Commission's ongoing planning and review procedures for post secondary education give adequate attention to the development of external studies; and

iii) proposals based on elements of both of the abovementioned approaches.

19. The Committee agreed on a particular variation of the latter approach which is set out in summary form below -

i) annual State-wide review of external studies focussing on major developments -

each institution would prepare a report for internal use and for dissemination to WAPSEC and the other post secondary education institutions; and

ii) annual forum discussion -

convened by WAPSEC with institution representatives, and other interested parties and focussing on major issues emerging from the institution reports.

20. The specific layout adopted for the annual review reports would be determined by individual institutions, but it would be desirable for all those using the reports, that aspects such as those listed below were included

- overview of external programs offered, indicating new initiatives;
- program developments proposed in the immediate future and longer term.

- other initiatives introduced or proposed in terms of support facilities, for example study support for remote students, counselling provisions, tutorial arrangements for external students;

- information on enrolments, profile of the external student population, course completions; and

- major issues for consideration and discussion, for example unmet demands and needs, collaboration between institutions, and development of jointly supported facilities.

21. The Committee believes that this proposal for the co-ordination of external studies would have the following advantages -

i) the procedures provide for the Commission and the institutions to work together on the broader issues affecting the development of external studies; and

ii) the review and reporting mechanism would facilitate the institutions' internal decision processes, promote communication between institutions, provide a basis for WAPSEC's monitoring and development responsibilities, and provide assurance to the CTEC with respect to effective arrangements for the development of external studies in the State.

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ATTACHMENT 1

REVIEW OF EXTERNAL STUDIES

Participants in Discussions

Members of the Commission's External Studies Committee had discussions with the following institution representatives -

Murdoch University

Mr D Dunn, Secretary of the University
Mr P Guiton, Director of External Studies

The University of Western Australia

Professor G Reid, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Mr P Seaman, Acting Director of University Extension

The Western Australian Institute of Technology

Dr H Nash, Assistant Director
Mr G Idle, Head of External Studies

The Western Australian College of Advanced Education

Mr J Liddelow, Deputy Director
Dr B Lawrence, Associate Dean, Academic

Education Department

Mr R Farren, Principal, Technical Extension Service
Mr E Styles, Superintendent of Teacher Development

Hedland College

Dr V Gidley, Director

Karratha College

Dr A Walkington, Director

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